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The Snake Dance

of the

Moqui Indians.

CLARENCE H. SHAW.

This is a prayer for rain in which the snakes danced with are afterward set free to convey the prayers of the dancers to their Deities in the underworld.

The secret rites previous to the dance are held in the "Kiva," an underground chamber.

Just before the dance the snakes are deposited in the "Kisi," a bower of cottonwood, on the dance plaza.

The "Si-pa-pu," upon which the dancers stamp as they march past the "Kisi," to inform the spirits of the underworld that the dance is in progress, is an excavation over which a flat slab of stone has been placed. It gives a hollow sound under the dancers' feet.

The dance is participated in by two orders of priests: the Antelope and the Snake priests.

The dance is followed by the purification ceremony, in which the dancers partake of an emetic and, going to the edge of the cliff, proceed to get rid of everything upon their stomachs. This is not an antidote for snake poison, but is purely ceremonial.

The first picture shows the head Snake priest descending into the Antelope "Kiva," to inform the Antelopes that the dance will begin.

Number 2—The exit of the Antelope priests to line up for the dance.

Number 3—Line-up of the Antelopes preparing to enter the dance plaza.

Number 4—Entry of the Antelopes to the dance plaza. On the right is the "Kisi," In the center is a shrine.

Number 5—Shows Antelopes chanting in front of the "Kisi," awaiting the arrival of the Snake priests.

Number 6—Entry of the Snake priests. The second in line is seen to stamp upon the "Si-pa-pu."

Number 7—Chanting of the Antelopes and Snakes. This snake line is composed of groups of three: The Indian who dances with the snake in his mouth, an attendant who dances beside him and engages the attention of the snake with a feather whip, and another who dances behind him and gathers the snakes up as the dancer drops them.

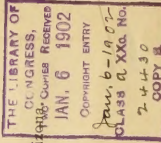
Number 8—Shows us a group of dancers with a big bull snake which, it can readily be seen, is not venomous. The attendant dancer is making no effort to engage it with his feather, and its head is thrust into the face of the dancer, whose expression shows that he is not afraid of it.

Number 9—How different the attitude here. A rattlesnake is seen, and the fierce expression of determination on the dancer's face shows that he knows what a death he is carrying in his mouth. The attendant too is alert, his feather at the very head of the rattler, which is thrust through the hair of the dancer.

Number 10—The purification. The first man in line has not yet succeeded. His look of pained expectancy is amusing. The satisfied expression of number two tells us that he is through with his "purification." The next one is trying to assist the emetic in its work by poking a long feather down his throat. Further along we see three upon whom the dose is working with entire success, and another who is trying to stuff his hand down his throat.

Number 11—A bunch of rattlesnakes.

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